DICK RODNEY;

Or, The Adventures of An Eton Boy...

BY JAMES GRANT.

CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

"Bah!" said the Spaniard, grinning and showing a row of sharp, white teeth, under a dirty and sable mustache; "though I said so, I knew better. A shipboy seldom has a gold watch like this," he added, displaying my gold repeater. "Now, we shall keep you; and if this seaman—after he has first sworn that he will not betray us—does not return to us here with $500 within two hours after sunset, par el"—(here he made a dreadful vow in Spanish), "we will toss you like a dead dog into the ventana of the mountain. Look down, and see what a journey is before you," he added, with a diabolical smile, as he dragged me to the beetling edge of the chasm and forced me to look into it.

Our eyes had now become so accustomed to the light of the gallery or grotto that the rays of sunshine falling through the fissure above us were sufficient to disclose a portion of the vast profundity on the verge of which we stood.

From the earth's womb, far, far down below, there came upward a choking steam, with a hollow, buzzing sound, which deepened at times to a rumble.

This steam or mist rose and fell on the currents of air; sometimes it sank so low that nothing but a black and dreary void met the eye, which ached in attempting to pierce it. Anon the steam would rise in spiral curls from that gloomy bed below, where doubtless the fires of the now almost extinct volcano seethe their embers in the waves of the ocean.

The words "have mercy" were on my lips, but I could not utter them; nor would they have availed me. Ignorant of what the ruffian said, and believing he was about to thrust me in, poor Tom Lambourne, in the fullness of his heart, uttered a howl of dismay; and at that moment the sentinel, whom the gang had left at the entrance to their lurking-place, came hurriedly on, with alarm expressed in his glittering eyes, and a finger placed, as a warning, on his hairy lip.

"Para! Paz! Silenzio!" (hold—peace—silence), he exclaimed, and added that four officers from the garrison of Santa Cruz had dismounted in the ravine, unbitted their horses and had seated themselves under a tree to smoke.

This information was received by the band with oaths and mutterings of impatience; and by us with mingled emotions of hope and agony—hope that they might be the means of our escape or rescue; and agony to know that such means were so near, and yet could avail us nothing; for on the slightest sound being made by either of us, there were the Albacete knives of our captors on one hand, and the ventana—that awful ventana—on the other, to insure forever the silence and oblivion of the grave.

Not the least of my sufferings was from the cord which secured my wrists. Already the skin was swollen, cut and bleeding in consequence of the tightness with which these wretches had bound me.

CHAPTER XI.

Sequel to Our Adventure.

For two hours—they seemed an eternity to me—it would appear, the four Spanish officers lingered over their wine-flasks and cigars in the wooded ravine, their movements being duly reported from time to time by one of the outlaws, who stole to the cavern mouth and peeped out.

At last they mounted, and rode off, when a fresh cause for wrath and delay was produced by the announcement that a wagon, drawn by mules, and attended by several laborers and negroes, had broken down on the road about a mile distant.

The irritation of our Spaniards—some of whom spoke of having a ship to join—was now so great that I feared they might end the whole affair by disposing of us in a summary manner.

This wagon being heavily laden caused a delay for several hours. The sun's rays ceased to shine through the fissure above us; the grotto drew dark by the increase of imperceptible shadows; the dingy faces of our olive-skinned detainers grew darker still; and their impatience was only surpassed by ours, for we, too, had a ship to rejoin.

Every minute of these hours—every second of every minute—passed slowly, like a pang of agony in my heart; and every feature of that natural vault, through which the dying daylight stole—with the faces and voices of the men whose victims we were, and more than all, the ceaseless and eternal buzz in the dark chasm that yawned close by—the ventana, or nostril of the Piton—are yet vividly impressed upon my memory.

At last the darkness was so great that a lantern was lighted, and its wavering gleams, as they fell on the crystals, the spar, quartz, and glassy blocks of black obsidian and ruddy lava, which formed the walls and arch of the cavern, on the dark ferocious visages, the gaudy sashes, the naked arms and feet, the scrubby black beards, and brass-mounted knives and muskets of the taciturn Spaniards, who sat in a sullen group smoking paper cigaritos—all added to the gloomy but picturesque horror of the place and of the incident.

"Antonio, que hora es?" I heard one say, inquiring the time.

"Las neuve y media, companero mio" (half-past nine), replied the possessor of my gold watch, which he consulted with considerable complacency.

"Maldita!" growled the others, knitting their brows, for the dusk was rapidly becoming darkness, and they had no desire for killing us, if we could be made profitable. I have often thought since that had Tom actually procured and returned with the required ransom of $500, they would have pocketed it and then killed us both—me most certainly, as they seemed to have other views for poor Tom in the Southern States.

"We have had a long spell of this," said he, in a low voice. "I am going to escape, if I can."

"Escape! but how?"

"I don't know exactly how yet; but we must first have our lashings cast off."

"Would to heaven they were, Tom. My hands are so swollen and my wrists so cut and benumbed that my arms are well-nigh powerless," I whispered in a low voice, like a groan.

"Sit with me here, in the shadow of this angle of rock; and now, as the darkness is fairly set in, I shall soon make you free."

By a rapid and skillful application of his strong teeth to the cord, which bound my wrists, he untwisted the knot and freed my hands; and then in the suddenly-given luxury of being able to stretch my arms, I almost forgot the necessity for concealing the fact that I was now unbound.

I soon found an opportunity for untying Tom's fetters. Then we kept our hands clasped before us, waited and hoped—we scarcely knew for what—while in the further end of this inner cave, our detainers sat sullenly smoking, and, by the dim lantern light, making up cigaritos from their tobacco pouches and those little rice-paper books which are now procurable nearly everywhere.

From the conversation of our captors I could gather that our brig, the Eugenie, was visible at anchor in the roadstead of Santa Cruz, a mile or so distant.

Three of these Spaniards had placed their muskets against the wall of rock and seemed disposed to doze off to sleep.

Close by us lay the plank which crossed that dread ventana, like the infernal bridge of Poulsherro, which the Mahommedans believe crosses the sea of fire that on the day of doom shall separate Good from Evil. Tom and I looked at it and exchanged glances of intelligence from time to time, but the attempt to rush across might prove doubly fatal to one or both. A slip of the foot would hurl us into eternity; and if the passage were achieved we would be exposed to the fire of those we fled from and met by that of the armed man at the mouth of the grotto.

Thus our position and its perils were somewhat complicated.

Suddenly the distant report of a piece of ordnance, coming from the seaward, made us look up and listen.

"El ruido que hace el canon" (the crack of a gun), exclaimed a Spaniard, scrambling up to the lower end of the fissure in the arch of the grotto, and looking out.

"We all know that well enough; but what does it mean?" asked the other.

The English brig at the anchorage has fired it. I see a light glittering on her deck; and now away it goes up to the foremast head."

"It is the Eugenie, Master Rodney," whispered Tom.

"Can the captain be about to sail tonight—and without us?" said I, with growing dismay.

"No; but he is impatient for us to come off. He knows well what a 'tarnal slippery set of imps these Jack Spaniards are, and has shown a light and fired a gun as a hint for us to look sharp."

"Companero," said one of the Spaniards to the other, who was looking out, "are you sure that it is the English brig and not ours?"

"Yes; but by St. Paul! there is a light burning now on the Castle de Santa Cruz; so our craft had better get her sweeps out and put to sea, even without us. Can the Senor Gobernador have smelt a rat?"

This announcement, though we knew not what it referred to, had an evident effect on our captors, who were probably part of a slaver's crew; for they all scrambled up to the opening in the rocks to look out.

"Now, now is the time to slip our cables and run. Follow me!" said Tom Lambourne, in a hoarse but determined whisper, as he sprang forward, snatched up two of the muskets and rushed across the plank, tripping as lightly as he would have done along a boom or yard, though it crossed a gulf so terrible.

Less steadily, but not less rapidly, you may be assured—yet with a frozen heart—I followed him, and his hard, tarry hand was ready to grasp mine and dragged me forward into safety, while with a violent kick he tossed the plank away, and surging, down it went into the black gulf we had crossed.

It vanished in a moment, and no sound ever ascended, for it seemed to have fallen into a pit that was as dark as it was bottomless.

"Take this musket, and see that you can use it, sir," said Tom, as an emotion of bravado seized him. "And so, you, Spanish greenhorns!" he shouted, "you thought to sell me for a nigger to the Yankees, did you? Whoop! hurrah!"

A volley of Spanish oaths followed this rash outburst, which drew their attention at once upon us. Some rushed to the dark brink, and paused, I suppose, for neither Tom nor I could see distinctly, as there was a double explosion which filled the cavern with echoes like those of rolling thunder, and a momentary glare of smoky light, while two musket balls whistled past us, and I felt one, like a hot cinder, as it grazed my left ear. Then came an Albacete knife, which was hurled by no erring hand, for it wounded Tom's right knee.

"Give them a shot, Mr. Rodney!" said he, furiously; "I'll reserve my fire for the sentry—and here he is, already!"

And just as the eighth fellow, who was on the watch, alarmed by the firing, came rushing in with his piece at full cock, Tom fired at him.

"Saints and angels!" yelled the Spaniard as he bounded into the air and then fell flat on his face, where he lay beating the earth with his feet and hands.

"Fire! fire! Master Rodney, and then run for it, before they can reload," cried Tom, who saw that I was irresolute; "give 'em a stern chaser!"

My blood was now fairly up. Wheeling round, I leveled full at the group, one of whom was in the act of taking aim at me, while I saw the steel ramrod of the other, who had a musket, glitter in the lantern light as he reloaded.

I fired! I know not whether the ball hit, but one of the ruffians sprang wildly forward and fell headlong into the ventana!

"That will do!" cried Tom; "away now as fast as we can—stretch out—bear away for the harbor and the brig!"

Grasping our newly- acquired weapons, which we never thought of relinquishing, we rushed out, and, descending the ravine, favored by the starlight, instinctively took the path which led directly to the harbor.

With a heart that beat wildly, a head in a whirl of thoughts, and every pulse quickened by the whole affair—by the ferocious treatment to which we had been subjected for so many hours, by the perils which had menaced us, by the narrow escapes we had made from bullets, by the wild and disastrous tragedy which closed the adventures of a long and exciting day—I ran beside Tom Lambourne; on, on, without a breath to spare or a word to utter.

(To be continued.)

REMARKABLE AUCTION BIDS.

Relics Which Have Brought Big Sums at Sales

The Zola sale in France, at which a little table was sold for more than 250 times its value, recalls many instances of remarkable bids at auction sales, says Tit-Bits. Zola's table was worth £4 16s, but the first bid for it was £1,280, and the auction became probably unique in the annals of sales by being closed after a single bid. It is not the first time that a table has been sold for such a remarkable sum, though it is probably the first time that such an article has fetched such a big price. Cicero's table was put up to auction after his death, but the highest bid was £750. Another historic article for which an enormous price was paid was Cato's purple robe, which Nero bought for £6,800. The habit worn by Charles XII. at Pultowa was sold for £22,000, and a cup used by Napoleon went for 37 guineas. The hat which Napoleon wore at Eylau was keenly bid for at auction by thirty-two persons and was knocked down at £75. Mr. Quaritch, the famous bookseller, recently advertised two of his rarest volumes for sale for £10,250, a sum which may seem ridiculous to most readers. Mr. Quaritch, however, once bid £4,900 for a Latin Psalter, and £3,900 for a Mazarin Bible at an auction sale. Five hundred and forty guineas for a snuff-box suggests that the bidder was verging on madness, but a snuffbox from the emperor of Brazil's collection was once knocked down at this price. Another, supposed to have belonged to Marie Antoinette, sold for 320 guineas, bids of 50 and 100 guineas being quite common at snuff-box sales. A vase in the British museum was knocked down at 1,000 guineas, and two violins—a Stradivarius and a Ruggari—were sold at a sale for £760 and £1,280, respectively. A violin bow by Tourte was sold for £44, and the autograph of Sir Isaac Newton once drew a bid of £64. An admirer of George IV. a few years ago bid £18 for a walking stick which belonged to the king. A silver penny of William the Conqueror's reign was sold nine years ago for £32, and a half-crown of the reign of Queen Elizabeth went for £44. Lord Fitzhardinge once bid 4,500 guineas for a calf at Lord Dunmore's sale. The previous highest price for a bull was 1,000 guineas, bid at a sale at Ketton. Lord Fitzhardinge's bid was the highest ever made in England.

Don't neglect to keep your shoes polished. You can always shine at one end if you can't at the other.

WONDERFUL STRIDES.

AMERICA THE COMMERCIAL MISTRESS OF THE WORLD.

The All-Conquering Trade Rivalry of the United States Is the Subject of Serious Apprehension Among the Nations of the World.

The commercial progress of the United States, as revealed by the statistics of international trade, is not only attracting the earnest attention of European nations, but it is exciting among them more or less apprehension. A nation which has shown an increase of 51 per cent in its exports in a decade, and which has had, in the single year 1898, a volume of exports exceeding by nearly $88,000,000 those of Great Britain, which, for a century, has been the commercial mistress of the world, may indeed be considered a dangerous rival. Not alone in our agricultural exports have we shown marvelous gains, but in our exports of manufactures which in the last calendar year exceeded in value the entire total of domestic exports for any year prior to 1870, with the exception of 1866 and 1861. The gain in this important item of manufacturing exports seems unmistakably to show that, stimulated by a protective tariff, our manufacturing industries have thrived to such an extent that we have not only met the increased demand for home consumption, but have been able successfully to invade foreign competitive fields. And, moreover, this invasion of fields, especially in the far East, which have been sedulously cultivated by the principal European commercial nations in the hope of undisturbed occupancy, is made even more possible by our changed territorial conditions which have resulted from the war with Spain. Therefore it is extremely probably that there will be uninterrupted gains in our manufacturing exports, though there may be some occasional check owing to varying changes in crop conditions, to the increase in our agricultural exports.

But the gain in our exports, marvelous though it may be, seems to concern European nations in a less degree than do our steadily diminishing imports, these being smaller during the last calendar year than for any year in eighteen years, save the year 1885. And the fact that this decrease in imports has resulted from the operation of our protective tariff, which must continue in force at least for two years, is really the greatest source of anxiety to Europeans. We are continually buying smaller quantities of English, German and French silk and woolen goods, the improvement in the quality and styles of these fabrics which are manufactured here leading to a larger domestic consumption of them; and here again is another cause for anxiety on the part of European manufacturers.

Statistics show that during the decade from 1888 to 1897, covering a period in which both the McKinley and the Wilson tariffs were in force, our imports increased only 5.6 per cent, while those of the United Kingdom gained 16.3, the Netherlands 34 and Russia 51.4 per cent, while from 1891 to 1897 Germany showed an increase of 10.8 per cent. This would seem to indicate that the United States is growing less dependent upon Europe by reason of our industrial progress, while Europe is growing more dependent upon America, and proof that we are almost wholly the beneficiary is found in our increasing exports as above noted. It is a remarkable fact that Japan during the above-mentioned decade increased her imports 121.9 and her exports 63.1 per cent, but those gains were due to exceptional causes. No other country than Japan, among all the commercial nations, shows for the decade such an enormous expansion of exports and so slight a gain in imports as does the United States. And no country in the world shows for the fiscal year and the calendar year 1898 exports of double the amount of imports. The singular fact may, however, be noted that Great Britain's imports during the last calendar year were about double the exports, the former being $2,353,020,000, while the latter were $1,166,955,000, and this remarkable difference has probably not before appeared during the commercial history of that country. Here is a complete reversal in the trade conditions of the two nations; and of so striking a character that it must compel thoughtful consideration. The marvelous change in the relation between exports and imports in the United States is mainly the result of internal industrial developments which are progressing with irresistible force, and, therefore, must continue uninterruptedly. The reverse change noted in Great Britain is clearly due not so much to internal as to external causes, chief among which are the rapidly increasing competition of the United States in fields hitherto almost exclusively enjoyed by Great Britain.

Do we not find in the statistics of the commerce of Germany and France evidence of the effect of the successful commercial rivalry of the United States? Germany's exports in the year 1897 show a gain in six years of only 13.5 per cent, while those of France increased in a decade only 10.6 per cent. Bearing in mind the fact that the exports of these countries are chiefly manufactures, and that until recently this country has been the most profitable customer of these nations, we can very readily discern the motive for the somewhat unfriendly attitude of Germany and of France during our war with Spain—an attitude which on the part of Germany at least it was so frequently deemed necessary officially to disavow. Commercial rivalry naturally fosters jealousy, and this grows more intense as evidence accumulates of the futility of efforts successfully to resist or to check this rivalry. This, then, is undoubtedly the root of the ill feeling which has so frequently been manifested by the Germans and the French since our protective tariff became operative, and since our manifestation of aggressive commercial progress which followed the election of President McKinley.

With the development of the immense resources of Cuba and of Porto Rico, with the subjugation of the Filipinos and the establishment of order in the Philippine archipelago as preliminary to the extension of our commerce in the far East, with the construction of the Nicaraguan canal, thus giving us the same advantages in the Orient as have been enjoyed in India and in China by Great Britain and by other nations since the opening of the Suez canal, and with an adherence to the policy of protection the United States will easily be in the front rank among commercial nations within the next decade, and will at least be the equal of Great Britain as a financial power.

VERY DISCOURAGING FOR SOME PEOPLE.

REVENUE FRAUDS.

"Obstructing Competition" Is What the Free Traders Call the Crusade Against Undervaluation.

The following curious scrap of misinformation appears in the Philadelphia Record of recent date:

"It appears that complaints of the undervaluations of imported goods under the present tariff are far more frequent than they were under the Wilson law. Nothing could be more natural than the attempts to defraud the customs when the exorbitant rates of duty on woolens and some other imports offer such large inducements for smuggling and manipulating invoices of merchandise. In order to prevent frauds the manufacturers have in their employ a number of "special agents" who are apt to sniff a false valuation in every importation of woolens, gloves, laces, etc. These agents have undertaken to instruct the board of appraisers in their duties, and as the board is not always disposed to accept instructions from this source, the agents have complained against some of its members to the secretary of the treasury and the president. The real merits of this controversy have not yet been fully disclosed, and it is quite as probable that the special agents have offended by an excess of zeal in behalf of the manufacturers, who have a strong interest in obstructing competition, as that the experienced members of the board of appraisers have erred in permitting undervaluations of merchandise."

While it is possibly true that complaints of the undervaluation of imported goods are more frequent now than they were under the Wilson law, it by no means follows that just cause for complaint is more frequent now than then.

As a matter of fact the undervaluation was at its height in the four years of low tariff and no tariff which ended with the enactment of the Dingley law. During that lamentable period complaints as to undervaluations were distinctly unwelcome at the office of the New York appraiser of merchandise, and every complainant was made to understand that he was persona non grata. Undervaluation and classification frauds were with impunity perpetrated under the very noses of the officials intrusted with the enforcement of the revenue laws.

A case in point will illustrate the practice then prevalent. To a house heavily engaged in the importation of dress goods came the agent of a French factory soliciting an order. When a price had been named the local merchant said: "We can do better than that by importing the goods in the gray and dyeing them in this country." To his surprise, the foreign agent promptly met this price with the statement: "I will lay down the goods, already dyed, at the same figure you name for the undyed fabrics."

This was an extraordinary proposition, since it involved the added expense of dyeing and finishing, besides the material increase of duty imposed upon dyed as contrasted wnth undyed goods.

"How is it possible to do this at a profit?" asked the local merchant.

"Never mind the 'how,'" was the reply of the foreign agent. "Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies. I know how to do it, isn't that enough?"

It was enough, and the order was placed and the goods delivered as specified. Of course, there could be but one explanation as to the "how." To deliver goods dyed and finished at the same price as that asked by a rival concern for goods "in the gray" meant that the competing agent enjoyed especial facilities for getting his goods through the custom house at a figure so far below a fair valuation as to cover the added cost of dyeing and finishing and still leave a margin of profit. There was no other way. Result, the government robbed by its revenues, the American workingman robbed of his opportunity to dye and finish the goods in this country, and every honest importer robbed of the chance of fair and honorable competition.

All this is now changed. The atmosphere of go-as-you-please, protection-is-robbery, tariff-is-a-tax, free trade and unobstructed competition which permeated the customs service in New York during four years of Clevelandism has given place to the wholesome air of sincere endeavor to enforce the law as it is, and to collect the revenues to which the government is legally entitled. Undervaluation frauds are not more frequent now than formerly; on the contrary, they are far less prevalent. The difference in their treatment has a marked tendency to discourage the nefarious practice. If we hear more about this class of revenue evasion now than during the period of the Wilson law it is because merchants and manufacturers suffering from the unfair competition of undervalued consignments are now certain of being accorded a respectful hearing and having their just grievances promptly and energetically attended to.

Not only is the undervaluation evil being effectively dealt with, but the crime of smuggling, which was never so rampant as under the Wilson law, has been minified in a marked degree, and in the matter of precious stones, heretofore its chief field of operations, has almost entirely disappeared. Much of the success of the local customs officials in bringing about these desirable reforms is doubtless due to the cooperation of reputable business men, whose assistance in this regard is now welcomed and valued, where formerly it was discouraged and disliked. The radical change in policy is not pleasing to free traders, who see in it an obstruction to competition, as the Philadelphia Record puts it, which was not so before. The American people may be trusted to take a different view of the matter. The Dingley law is their law, and they expect that it will be effectively, honestly and fairly enforced, to the end that the government shall not be cheated of its rightful revenues, and that fair competition in business shall not be obstructed as the result of dishonest and unlawful practices. If there be in the wheels of governmental administration any cogs which fail to work in harmony with this general plan of operation it is natural and inevitable that such cogs should be replaced by those that will perform their functions in a more satisfactory manner. Such a change cannot fail to improve the efficiency of the new apparatus, even though it may seem to reflect to the disadvantage of the former machine. This is an age of improvement.

How to Please England.

We are informed that "tariff revision would be accepted by England as the one indisputable proof of the friendly sentiments of the United States." It is easy to divine the sort of "tariff revision" England would regard as "indisputable proof of the friendly sentiments of the United States." Nothing short of a tariff which would be virtually a free trade measure would be acceptable to England. Our Anglomaniacs are aware of that fact, and are quite willing to sacrifice protection in the interest of a closer union with the country of their love. If their leadership prevails the Republican party will turn its back on the principles for which it so long battled and become simply a political organization to advance British interests in this country.

Let us hope that the party of Abraham Lincoln and of James G. Blaine will never sink so low as this. To-day the advocates of imperialism and of a British aliance are the enemies in its ranks whom it has most to fear. They are willing to sacrifice all the traditions of the party to carry out their plans, and it will not be at all surprising if in the near future they demand that the policy of protection shall not stand in the way of these plans.—New York Irish World.

It Is Already a Failure.

The decrease in exports from Great Britain last year is said to have so affected the whole manufacturing element that the idea of preferential tariffs between the home country and all its dependencies, or some similar proposition, is likely to become a question of active domestic politics. This, of course, is a protective principle. If it should be adopted, the whole scheme of free trade, to which Great Britain has been devoted for half a century, would be admitted to be a failure.—Buffalo Express.